Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Australasian Gannet - photo Joy Weatherill

Mud Islands, South Channel Fort and Pope's Eye

Joy Weatherill

On 25th September, I went with Geelong Field Naturalists Club to Mud Islands, an exposed area of the Great Sands, and the most extensive sandbank in Port Phillip Bay, 90 kilometres south west of Melbourne and 10 kilometres inside Port Phillip Heads.

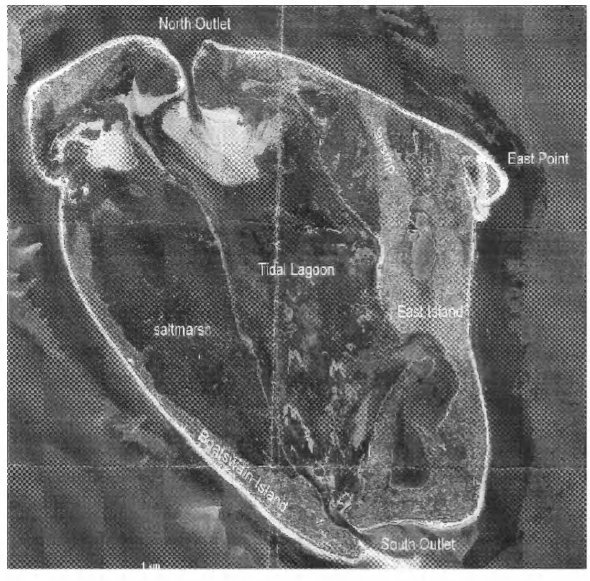
It is a land area of about 50 hectares surrounding a shallow tidal lagoon of 35 hectares. The shapes and configuration of the islands change due to movements of the sands by tidal currents, so at present, there are 2 land masses - Boatswain Island and East Island, and a North and South Outlet into the Tidal Lagoon.

We were taken by boat from Queenscliff and dropped off on East Island, from where we walked around to South Outlet.

Memories from my one previous visit about 25 years ago were having to wade ashore, and of thousands of screaming Silver Gulls. We walked straight onto the beach down a ramp, but there were still thousands of screaming gulls. Understandably they were upset, because there were many nests still with unhatched eggs and some new chicks. The nests are extremely rudimentary - a slight depression in the sand and a small amount of vegetation (a couple of sticks!).

We walked away from what seemed to be the main Silver Gull nesting area. There were also many Straw-necked Ibis and some White Ibis further inland among the salt bushes. Further along and inland, there was a Pelican rookery of about 80 nesting birds, and on the shoreline, a group of about 30 Crested Terns. Closer to South Outlet, it was good to see about 20 pairs of nesting Caspian Terns, their beaks at breeding time an iridescent red.

There were a few wading birds on the shoreline in the distance, but even with a telescope, I could not positively identify them, and we had to turn back to be in time for the boat pickup. Looking across to the Lagoon, there did not appear to be any waders there at this time - possibly because the water was too deep.



Areas above high water on Mud Islands were proclaimed a reserve in 1961, and are part of the Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Site. In 1982, this was designated as a wetland of international importance and part of Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park.

There are seagrass meadows, sand dunes, mudflats and saltmarshes on the islands. Plants such as Austral sea-blite and Shrubby glasswort help stabilise the land. Some 70 species of birds have been seen, and the area forms an essential breeding, feeding and roosting area for sea birds and waders including many migratory birds. In summer, about five and a half thousand White-faced Storm Petrels lay eggs in burrows. There are even more Silver Gulls that come to Mud Islands to breed.

Other birds include Crested Terns (nearly a thousand) a dozen breeding pairs of Caspian Terns and Australian Pelicans. Large numbers of Straw-necked Ibis and some White Ibis nest and roost on the islands.

Migratory birds including Pacific Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Eastern Curlew and Bar-tailed Godwits feed in the area and roost on the islands at high tide. Pied Oyster-catchers and Red-capped Plover regularly breed here.

The migratory birds come from as far afield as Alaska and Siberia, to rest and feed in an isolated location that gives some protection. They are not threatened by reptiles, cats, dogs or foxes. There are also no rabbits. But there are birds of prey like Swamp Harriers.

On our return to Queenscliff, we stopped off at South Channel Fort - built in the 1870's. White-faced Storm Petrels and Little Penguins nest in burrows here. The highlight was a close encounter with four Black-faced Cormorants sitting on the jetty. Passed Chinaman's Hat with a lot of lazy seals, and to Pope's Eye, an artificial structure made from a basalt rock annulus, where all available space on rocks and wooden platforms was taken up with nesting Australasian Gannets.

Above: consolidated shell grit forms the substrate of Mud Islands; Silver Gull nest; Crested Terns; Pelican rookery.

Left: Black-faced Cormorants

Below: Seals on Chinaman's Hat

Gannet rookery on Pope's Eye

November (1946) Observations

George Broadway

Continuing with Notes from "Wildlife" magazine of November 1946 (P. Crosbie Morrison Ed)

Identification of specimens sent in by readers. What had attracted attention this month? Specimens sent in by readers were rather fewer than usual this month, but an article I found of particular interest was that contributed by C W Brazenor, Mammalogist at the National Museum of Victoria. It concerned Leadbeaters Possum, which in 1946 was presumed to be extinct, not having been seen for 37 years.

The first two specimens were taken in the Bass River Valley in South Gippsland in 1867. They were described by Professor Frederick McCoy, of the University of Melbourne, and named after Mr J Leadbetter, the taxidermist at the Public Museum. The next discovery was made 30 years later when in 1900 a mounted specimen was presented to Sir Baldwin Spencer, Director of the National Museum. There was unfortunately no information regarding its provenance. A fourth specimen was found stuffed and mounted In the office of a Melbourne accountant; it was subsequently presented to the Museum.

In 1931 when Mr Brazenor took over the role of curator of mammals, he was greatly excited to find in a box of skins, another skin of Leadbeaters which had been hitherto overlooked. This specimen bore the label which said "From A.G. Wilson, Mount Wills, 1909." After this a search ensued to find this Mr Wilson. Brazenor traversed N.E Victoria calling on all the Wilsons that could be found between Bruthen and Mitta Mitta, all to no avail. After some months he received a letter from a Tom Hunter who had heard that he was seeking Mr Wilson. Tom Hunter revealed that he had at one time shared a shack owned by Mr Wllson at Sunnyside, a now derelict mining village at Mount Wills. He described how Wilson had at one time shot a small possum on the roof of the hut. This specimen was the one sent to the National Museum.

With great excitement Brazenor contacted Tom Hunter who took him to the site of the hut which by now had been reduced to the base of the chimney. What mattered was that a definite locality had been established. Despite this however, careful combing of the locality failed to find another specimen.

In the final paragraph he expresses the hope that one day a real-life specimen would be found when he would be able to write the missing chapter of the story of Leadbeaters Possum.

Post Script: After the 1939 bushfires it was believed that the species was certainly extinct, but on April 3, 1961, a specimen was found by Mr. Eric Wilkinson and shortly after a colony was discovered near Marysville. Unfortunately, much of the habitat was destroyed in the Black Saturday bushfires leaving the animal extremely vulnerable.

Some of the specimens sent were fungi, two puffballs from Charlton and Sunbury; a Stinkhorn, *Aseroe rubra* from Gembrook, and a basket fungus, *Clathrus* from Camberwell. Another "Stinkhorn" from Kensington was a *Lysurus*.

A bird specimen was a Black-shouldered Kite, which he points out should not have been shot.

Another specimen of the Tree Cricket, *Paragryllacris*, from Geelong and another from Pascoe Vale. (unfortunately my picture in the October NL for some reason did not print)

Longicorn Beetle, from Sandringham, a frequently asked question as they are/were often found in firewood. Perhaps not so often in these days of gas central heating.

Bean Weevils; develop from eggs laid in the bean seed, then eat their way out.

A Hummingbird Hawk Moth. (Peter Marriott does not include any such moth, however there is a Hummingbird Hawk Moth which visits the U.K. in Summer, *Macroglossum stellatarum*. As the name suggests, it hovers outside a flower while it sips nectar.)

Giant Water Bugs (Nepa) Sometimes called Water Scorpions although not even closely related. Has a long "tail" which is harmless and used for breathing and a large pointed beak which is used for sucking juices from their prey which is usually tadpoles . Being bugs they can not chew, only suck.

Right: Tree Cricket *Paragrillacris*

Below: Leadbeaters Possum - Sketch based on five stuffed specimens

Below right: Water Scorpion - Nepa CSIRO

Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks 4 and 5

Noel Young

Walk 4 on October 5th was led by Richard to the central part of the Kalimna Park, where a number of species were flowering profusely along a walking track east of the ridge road. Most remarkable was a solitary specimen of the Castlemaine Spider-orchid. Thousands of Billy-buttons, Tall Sundew, Waxlip Orchids, and many other species were noted before crossing the road to the circuit track on the west side. (See flowering species list page 8)

The final walk (5 on October 12) was to the "Boronia patch" at Irishtown. Peter Turner has supplied the following photos:

Clockwise from top left:
Hover-fly on Sticky Boronia;
Purple Beard-orchid;
Boronia anemonifolia;
Sticky Boronia occurs as shrubs 1 to 1.5 m high.

Wednesday Wildflowers list for Kalimna - 5 October 2016

supplied by Peter Turner

Plants seen in flower or bud

Acacia acinacea	Gold-dust Wattle
Acacia pycnantha	Golden Wattle
Arthropodium strictum	Chocolate Lily
Brachyloma daphnoides	Daphne Heath
Burchardia umbellata	Milkmaids
Caladenia carnea	Pink Fingers
Caladenia clavescens	**Castlemaine Spider-orchid**
Caladenia gracilis	Musky Caladenia
Cassinia arcuata	Coffee Bush
Craspedia variabilis	Billy-buttons
Daviesia leptophylla	Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea
Daviesia ulicifolia	Gorse Bitter-pea
Diuris pardina	Leopard Orchid
Drosera auriculata	Tall Sundew
Drosera aberrans	Scented Sundew
Glossodia major	Waxlip Orchid
Goodenia blackiana	Primrose Goodenia
Grevillea alpina	Downy Grevillea
Lomandra multiflora	Many-flowered Mat-rush
Microseris walteri	Murnong/Yam Daisy
Millotia tenuifolia	Soft Millotia
Ozothamnus obcordatus	Grey Everlasting
Philotheca verrucosa	Fairy Wax-flower
Pimelea linifolia	Slender Rice-flower
Prostanthera denticulata	Rough Mint bush
Rhytidosporum procumbens	White Marianth
Senecio sp	
Stackhousia monogyna	Creamy Candles
Tetratheca ciliata	Pink Bells
Thysanotus patersonii	Twining Fringe-lily
Wurmbea dioica	Early Nancy
Xerochrysum viscosum	Sticky Everlasting

Editor's Bit

The committee welcomes several new members -
Graeme Andeton, Ruth Forbes, Marli Wallace,
Greg Waddell and Trace Balla

Please note that the deadline for articles for the December issue is November 25.

Last month's mystery plant

Sticky Boronia - Boronia anemonifolia subs. anemonifolia (Rutaceae)

Boronia: after Francesco Barone, an Italian naturalist who died aged 25 in 1794. *anemonifolia*: anemone-leaved.

This year has been a particularly good year for the Sticky Boronia which is known to grow in only two locations near Castlemaine - at Irishtown and in the Muckleford Forest south of the Red, White and Blue Mine.

It is not known whether these are pioneer populations or relics of a more extensive population.

The flowers have four petals and four sepals - a distinguishing feature of Boronia plants - and these are pale pink with darker pink buds.

The leaves are narrow and sticky (hence the common name) and divided at the end (like anemone leaves).

It grows to a medium shrub and while the population seemed to have dwindled over the drought years, this years extensive display in the Irishtown area is quite breathtaking.

Ref: Perkins, E. 2016, *Plants of the Castlemaine District*

November Mystery Plant

This subtle little daisy which can be almost absent in drier years is presently flowering in the local bushland.

- Geraldine Harris

Mystery Bird

The bird shown last month was the first introduced species, the Eurasian Blackbird. No doubt ship assisted in the first place, it settled in Melbourne and Adelaide, but has spread around south eastern Australia. Unlike Sparrows and Starlings, it is rarely found in sizeable flocks. Normally family groups are found together and the juveniles will often depart to different locations. The male is totally black, with a bright yellow bill, whereas the female is browner in colour, often with speckling. The bird shown is a juvenile, which looks very similar to the female. Nests are usually found in trees or shrubs and are quite sizeable with normally three or four eggs. The nest from which the bird in the photo came was in fact under our house. Anne was keen to get rid of it, but it seems to have left of its own accord. They often scratch for food in vegetable gardens or the like, but don't do that much damage.

Now for this month's bird – a much more colourful specimen.

– Nigel Harland

Birds Australia Challenge Bird Count 2016 (Dec 3)

Every year CFNC participates in the bird count with several teams of observers setting out on a previously established route, taking in several known locations, and counting all the species that they can identify.

This is not a competition, but a general survey aimed at bolstering the long term data for Birds Australia, so the most important thing to aim for is consistency from year to year. Their main rule is that for a species to be recorded it should be seen by at least two or heard by three in the group.

In recent years the number of participants has been down, so if you think you can help please do. We try to have at least one or two experienced observers in each group. Meet at the usual car park (opposite the Castle motel) at 8am Saturday morning. Bring binoculars and sustenance. Most groups finish by about 1 or 2 pm. - Noel Young and Kit Morris

Guest speaker this month - Marilyn Hewish will talk about

Moths of Victoria

Moth study in Victoria is at about the same stage as bird study in the late 1800s. There are few moth addicts and our knowledge is limited and patchy. Anyone committed to the cause can find new species for the state or even species new to science. Even the simple and basic question, "Which moth belongs to which caterpillar" is a mystery for many species. Marilyn Hewish will talk about her moth-hunting travels around the state, show photos of some of our most gorgeous and bizarre species and describe how her work at the museum fits into exciting new discoveries and developments in the study of Victorian moths, including the book series *Moths of Victoria*.

The moth light will be set up outside. After the talk, a variety of moths in many sizes, shapes and colours will be on display for us to enjoy. Please bring a camera and/or hand lens if you can, a torch, and warm clothing if you want to linger.

Marilyn Hewish was awarded the Australian Natural History Medallion in 2013 for her contributions over many decades to studies of Australian birds and more recently of Victorian moths. She was editor of the annual *Geelong Bird Report* for 18 years, author of *Birds of the Long Forest*, and co-author of several of the series *Moths of Victoria*.

Observations

Denis Hurley 1st to 10th October

A pair of Pacific Black Duck visiting - the female tried to nest on the front verandah. Sadly, after 3 weeks a fox? found the eggs. Parents still around.

Male Rufous Whistler in the garden. Two pair of Crimson Rosella nesting in one metre high hollow stumps in front of the house. Leaden Flycatcher calling - was sighted at the back of property. White winged Choughs are nesting near my dam.

In north west Queensland first two weeks of August, Christine and I saw 20 or more Bustards.

Hundreds of Caper White butterflies flocking on Fryers ridge north, on October 16 - also recorded near Newstead by Geoff Park. - Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri Nov. 11 meeting: speaker MARILYN HEWISH - Moths

Sat Nov. 19 Roadside Cleanup - 9am start at cnr. Golf Links rd. on Pyrenees Highway - organiser Geoff Harris

Takes 1 – 2 hrs., Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Garbage bags and reflective vests will be supplied. Please note KABC rules prohibit anyone under 16 from working on the roadside.

Sat Dec 3 Annual Bird Count (start 8.00 am) see page 10.

Fri Dec 9 Members night - break-up

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2016
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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